

# Whitney Museum of American Art *News*

Vol. 2 No. 1

January 1983

ON THE BACK PAGE OF THIS NUMBER WALTZ MUSIC FROM "THE DREAM WALTZ."

THIS NUMBER  
"Why the Shah of Persia  
Has the Blues."

The World  Magazine

FOR THE WEEK OF  
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1908  
From  
THE NEW YORK TIMES



## NEW YORK'S ART WAR and the EIGHT "REBELS"

Who Have Dared to Paint Pictures of New York Life (Instead of Europe) and Who Are Holding Their Rebellious Exhibition All by Themselves.



"THE DUET" BY EVERETT SHINN



"FEEDING PIGS" BY GEORGE B. LUKS

**N**OT to be outdone by Paris or London, New York is having an art war all its own.

The rebels are in arms, their brushes bristling with fight, and the conservatives stand in solid phalanx to resist the onslaught of radicalism.

The question as stated by the radicals is: Shall there be an American art—an art that dares paint New York, for instance? Shall the American art school displace the schools of foreigners? Shall the streets and the people of this big, picturesque town be the subjects for



"AUTUMN, FLAME AND PASSION" BY ARTHUR B. DAVIES



THE HAYMARKET BY JOHN SLOAN



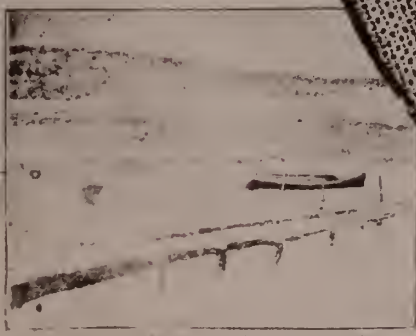
BATTERY PARK BY WM J. GLACKENS

the canvas rather than the dikes and windmills, the peasants and Venetian sailboats of the older school? First ruthlessness of the war came a long time

### The Eight

January 13—March 20, 1983

On the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of The Eight exhibition, the Whitney Museum of American Art has reassembled a major group of paintings from that historic event. Arthur B. Davies, William J. Glackens, Robert Henri, Ernest Lawson, George Luks, Maurice B. Prendergast, Everett Shinn, and John Sloan selected the paintings for an exhibition of their work at the Macbeth Galleries in New York in February 1908 in retaliation against the conservative policies and taste of the National Academy of Design. Through a look back, we hope to regain a sense of the dynamic beginning of twentieth-century American art.



"HUDSON RIVER IN WINTER" BY ERNEST R. LAWSON





Arthur B. Davies



Ernest Lawson



Everett Shinn



William J. Glackens

## Early Friendships Among The Eight

- 1892 John Sloan and William J. Glackens are fellow classmates at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia.  
Robert Henri meets Sloan at a studio party in Philadelphia; they discuss their admiration for Walt Whitman.
- 1893 Henri and Glackens enroll in a life class at the Academy.  
Formation of the Charcoal Club to provide an evening life class less expensive than the Academy's. Co-founded by Sloan, who becomes its secretary; Henri elected president. Glackens among those in attendance.  
Henri and Sloan share studio, where Henri begins a Tuesday evening discussion group attended by Sloan and Glackens.
- 1894 Everett Shinn and George Luks are employed as artists for the *Philadelphia Press*; they share living quarters.  
Shinn moves over to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, where he meets fellow *Inquirer* artist Sloan.  
Shinn and Luks begin attending Henri discussion group.  
Henri, Sloan, Glackens, and Shinn participate in an amateur theatrical for the benefit of Pennsylvania Academy alumni and students.  
Henri relinquishes studio at 806 Walnut Street to Sloan; then moves to another, at 1717 Chestnut Street, which he shares with Glackens, who turns over *his* former studio to Luks.  
Henri and Glackens visit New York, where they view paintings by Arthur B. Davies in a group show at the Macbeth Galleries.
- 1895 Henri and Glackens travel to France, Holland, and Belgium.
- 1896 Davies invites Henri to his first one-man show at the Macbeth Galleries; Henri, still in Europe, is unable to attend.
- 1897 Henri's first one-man show at the Macbeth Galleries, arranged by Davies.
- 1900 First one-man show at Macbeth's by Boston artist Maurice B. Prendergast.
- 1901 Henri organizes a group show at the Allan Gallery in New York, which includes Sloan, Glackens, four others, and himself.  
Glackens meets Prendergast; introduces him to Henri at the latter's studio in New York.
- 1904 Glackens moves to Washington Square; meets Ernest Lawson, who lives a block away.  
Henri organizes a group show at the National Arts Club in New York; exhibitors include Sloan, Glackens, Luks, Davies, Prendergast, and himself.
- 1906 Group exhibition at the Modern Art Gallery, New York, which includes Henri, Sloan, Glackens, Shinn, Luks, and Lawson.
- 1907 Selection of The Eight for the Macbeth Galleries show by Henri.

[B.B.P.]



Robert Henri



George Luks



Maurice B. Prendergast



John Sloan



Robert Henri's studio at 1717 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, which he shared with William J. Glackens, 1895. Standing: Henri (extreme left), Everett Shinn (third from left), Glackens (fifth from left), John Sloan (sixth from left). It was at such studio gatherings that four of The Eight became close friends. Photo: Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; Sloan Collection.



# The 75th Anniversary of The Eight

by Bennard B. Perlman, Guest Curator

"Never at an art exhibition in this city has there been such an attendance as gathered to view the pictures shown by 'The Eight' at the Macbeth Gallery," observed Guy Pène du Bois, the art critic for the *New York American*, on February 4, 1908. The exhibition had opened the previous day, featuring the work of Robert Henri, John Sloan, William J. Glackens, George Luks, Everett Shinn, Arthur B. Davies, Ernest Lawson, and Maurice B. Prendergast. It was a show which the New York City dailies applauded and damned, an event labeled "Secession in Art" by the *Herald* and an "Outlaw Salon" by the *American*. The *New York World* devoted a full page to "New York's Art War and the Eight 'Rebels.'" And while conservative art critics were quick to dismiss The Eight as "Apostles of Ugliness" who "had not emerged from that slough of despond," Mary Fanton Roberts, writing in *The Craftsman*, referred to them as "artists whose work is representative of the best that America has yet achieved in painting." Within a year of their group show they were seen as

"strong men [who] will no doubt be the founders of the first American School of Art."

\* \* \*

Four members of The Eight—Sloan, Glackens, Luks, and Shinn—began their careers as newspaper artists for the Philadelphia press. Although all four never worked simultaneously for the same paper, they became friends through classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, studio parties, and get-togethers at the papers. This was the era before the news photographer, when artist-reporters were dispatched to illustrate, with on-the-spot sketches, what the news reporters put into words. Drawing everything from a disastrous fire to a holiday parade, these men, all in their early twenties, quickly became the chroniclers of the city.

Enter Robert Henri, several years their senior, who had already completed two years of study at the Pennsylvania Academy and three in Paris. It was he who prodded them to paint; Glackens' first serious canvases were produced in 1893 and during six months with Henri in Paris in 1895, while Sloan's initial paintings were a dozen oils of girls' heads, done from models who posed for one of Henri's private classes. Although Sloan never actually studied with Henri, he referred to him as "my father in art" who "kept after me to think of being a serious painter."

Henri fashioned his philosophy in the classroom, first at the Women's School of Design in Philadelphia, then at the Velton School, the New York School of Art, and the Art Students League of New York. He stressed the importance of creating art with great speed and emotion at a time when art students traditionally labored over exacting details; he prodded his flock to paint the seamy side of the city in an era which emphasized fashionable upper Fifth Avenue or rural placidity as subject matter. He would say: "Artists are sometimes asked: 'Why do you paint ugly and not beautiful things?' The questioner rarely hesitates in his judgment of what is beautiful and what is ugly. . . . He should, therefore, pay high for Rembrandt's portrait of a gentleman, and turn with disgust from a beggar by Rembrandt."

By 1904 Henri and the newspaper-artists-turned-painters had all taken up residence in New York. Henri, the most widely exhibited of the group, sought to generate exhibition opportunities for the others. His appearance on the jury of the Pennsylvania Academy or Carnegie Institute annuals, and his persuasiveness, insured inclusion of



Group portrait of the Charcoal Club, 1893. Front row: Henri (second from right), Glackens (extreme left). Standing: Sloan (second from left). Co-founded by Sloan and with Henri as its president, the Charcoal Club, in its six-month existence, offered an evening life class with critiques on composition by Henri. Photo: Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; Sloan Collection.



Henri (standing), Shinn (left), and Sloan in Henri's former studio at 806 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, 1896, occupied at that time by Sloan. Photo: Photographs of Artists—Collection I, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

BENNARD B. PERLMAN is an artist, author, and art critic, and chairman of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts at the Community College of Baltimore. He wrote the first book devoted to The Eight, entitled *The Immortal Eight: American Painting from Eakins to the Armory Show* (New York: Exposition Press, 1962; revised edition, Westport, Conn.: North Light Publishers, 1979), and has lectured on The Eight at the National Gallery of Art, the Tacoma (Washington) Art Museum, Dartmouth College, and Oxford University. His biography *Robert Henri: His Life and Art* will be published shortly.

## NEW ART SALON WITHOUT A JURY.

Eight Artists Form Association in Opposition to the National Academy of Design.

MAY INVITE ENGLISHMEN

Mr. Robert Henri Heads the "Men of the Rebellion" Who Seek an Artistic Promised Land Here.

New York is to have a new salon of paintings with the "Men of the Rebellion," headed by Mr. Robert Henri and seven others as its sponsors. Mr. Henri, since his withdrawal from the jury of the recent exhibition at the Academy of Design on account of his dissatisfaction with the class of pictures accepted, has been looked upon as the leader of an expedition to an artistic Promised Land by a group of painters who admire his style.

his students and friends in the shows. It also often resulted in their being awarded prizes, despite the fact that he strongly opposed such awards:

The pernicious influence of prize and medal giving in art is so great that it should be stopped. You can give prizes justly for long-distance jumps, because you can measure jumps with a foot-rule. No way has been devised for measuring the value of a work of art.

Yet Henri realized that the artistic tastemaker of the day was the National Academy of Design, an august institution founded in 1825, which could make or break an artist's career by the mere inclusion or rejection of his work from its prestigious annual shows.

## ART SECESSIONISTS TO EXHIBIT WORK

Paintings by "The Eight" Will Be Shown in February—None of Still Life Included.

Preparations for the coming exhibition of "The Eight" are in progress, stimulated by the present show of the National Academy of Design, for these painters believe they can reveal an art more forceful and individual than that

When Henri viewed a National Academy annual for the first time in 1894, he was appalled, labeling it an "array of ignorance, presumption [and] old academicians." A dozen years later Henri was part of a six-man committee which brought about the amalgamation of the Society of American Artists with the National Academy. The Society had been formed in 1877 in revolt against the Academy's exhibition policy, but during the intervening years the annual shows of the two organizations gradually grew equally conservative. Belonging to one was often followed by election to membership in the other, as in Henri's case; in fact, those like Henri who had previously been Associates of the Acad-





The jury for the 1907 annual exhibition at the National Academy of Design, New York. The antagonists are all seated in the front row: Henri (second from left), Kenyon Cox (fourth from left), Academy president Frederick Dielman (fourth from right) and Charles Yardley Turner (extreme right). It was Henri's withdrawal of two of his paintings during the judging of this show that led to the formation of The Eight. Photo: Library, The Art Students League of New York.

It was a show which the New York City dailies applauded and damned. . . . Of the seven works sold from the show, four were purchased by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.

emy were now, as a result of the union, automatically raised to the status of full-fledged Academicians. After the merger of the two groups was complete, a thirty-man jury was selected for the National Academy's 1907 spring show. Each juror had held dual membership and Henri was among them.

Henri encouraged his students to submit work to the exhibition, and he sent three paintings of his own: full-length portraits of *General David Perry*, a retired cavalry officer, and *The Matador (Felix Asiego)*, and a smaller composition, *Spanish Gypsy Mother and Child*. The thirty jurors assembled on March 1, 1907, at the American Fine Arts Society building on West Fifty-seventh Street to select the show from among nearly 1,500 entries. The works were stacked against the walls of the most spacious hall in the National Academy's exhibition space, the Vanderbilt Gallery. It was a grand, two-story salon, a \$100,000 gift of George Washington Vanderbilt, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's uncle, whose carriage houses once stood on the spot. As the jurymen sat on hard benches and settled down to the monstrous task at hand, each work was individually placed before them and voted upon. The jurors used a numerical system to categorize the works: number 1 designated unanimous acceptance, 2 majority acceptance, and 3 one-third in favor. The letter R indicated an outright rejection.

Initially Henri was elated when paintings by Edith Bell, George Bellows, and Homer Boss, the first of his students to be considered, received favorable votes. But as the day wore on he became concerned that some worthy works had either barely gained a number 3 vote or had been rejected.



Robert Henri. *General David Perry*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 85 x 45 inches. The painting is shown as it hung in the Vanderbilt Gallery of the American Fine Arts Society building during the 1907 National Academy of Design annual. Photo: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Peter A. Juley and Son Collection.



Carl Sprinchorn. *A Winter Scene on the East Side, New York*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Sigmund M. Hyman. Henri's failure to have this painting, by one of his students, included in the 1907 National Academy of Design annual was a contributing factor in the formation of The Eight.

On the second day the jury reviewed its decisions. All works in categories 1, 2, and 3 were examined again, and where the vote was changed, it usually resulted in a lower ranking. At one point Henri sought to have paintings by Glackens, Luks, Shinn and two of his pupils, Carl Sprinchorn and Rockwell Kent, reconsidered, as was his prerogative according to the jury rules. Yet when each canvas was voted upon again, the verdict remained unchanged.

The jury reconvened for the third and final day of the judging. Of Henri's three entries, *General David Perry* and *The Matador* had remained in the number 1 ranking, while the *Spanish Gypsy Mother and Child* was voted number 2. But when the final votes were cast, *The Matador* dropped to number 2 as well. Piqued by the decision, Henri made a unique request: that he be permitted to withdraw both of his second-place works. As an Academician he was guaranteed one painting in the show jury free.

Frederick Dielman, the Academy president and likewise a juror, tried to placate him by suggesting another vote be taken on *The Matador*, and another member of the jury mockingly assured Henri: "Oh, they'll be hung all right." But Henri stuck to his demand. That evening he revealed the day's proceedings to John Sloan, whose reaction is recorded in his diary:

The puny puppy minds of the jury were considering his works for #2, handing out #1 to selves and friends and inane work and presuming to criticize Robert Henri. I know that if this page is read fifty years from now it will seem ridiculous that he should not have had more honor from his contemporaries.

Henri took the indignity in stride, as revealed in a letter to his mother: "I have just gotten through with the

## ACADEMY CAN'T CORNER ALL ART

Eight Progressive Painters Unite  
to Fight Reactionary  
Methods.

WILL SHOW THEIR WORK IN  
SPITE OF OLDER BODY.

As a result of the National Academy of Design's recent harsh attitude toward art and artists of vigorous and personal expression, a group consisting at present of eight well-known painters has been formed to hold annual exhibitions in New York and perhaps in other cities.

The members of this group thus far chosen are as follows: Arthur Davies, William Glackens, Robert Henri, Ernest Lawson, George Luks, Maurice Prendergast, Everett Shinn and John Sloan.

N.A.D. jury—lasted all Friday, Saturday and Sunday—tired out. I have only one picture—the General—I had sent two others but withdrew them."

Prior to the formal opening of the exhibition on March 15, 1907, the full Jury of Selection reconvened once more to approve the work of its three-member Hanging Committee. Although it was charged with arranging the show in a harmonious manner, creating a so-called "mural effect," the Hanging Committee represented, in effect, a second jury. It was empowered to eliminate some 200 works of its own choosing, ostensibly due to lack of space; however, the majority of those accepted paintings which would not be hung failed to conform to academic norms.

Strolling from gallery to gallery, Henri spotted the canvases of Sloan, Lawson, and his students Bellows, Bell, and Julius Golz. In the revered Vanderbilt Gallery was his own portrait of *General David Perry* with paintings by Glackens and pupils Homer Boss and Arnold Friedman nearby. But where were Luks' *Woman with Macaws* and Carl Sprinchorn's large canvas, *A Winter Scene on the East Side*, New York?

Henri had previously extolled the Sprinchorn painting, having been quoted in a newspaper article headlined: "New York's Art Anarchists: Here Is the Revolutionary Creed of Robert Henri and His Followers":

Here is the work of a boy named Sprinchorn . . . New York white-wings cleaning east side streets after a snowstorm—not an idealized study but just as we have seen them. . . . Truthful isn't it? Well, a couple of years ago that boy came to me with a study in still-life to show as a specimen of his work—fruit, I think it was, or a glove and a water pitcher—





Postcard drawing sent by Everett Shinn to John Sloan, January 13, 1908. Pencil and ink,  $3\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; Sloan Collection. The caption reads: "Sloan. Why not go up Fifth Avenue like this."

## ARTISTS JOIN IN AN EXHIBITION

Davies, Glackens, Henri, Lawson, Luks, Prendergast, Shinn, and Sloan Combine.

you know the kind. It was one of the worst I ever saw, and I told him so. He stopped studying bananas and water pitchers and went out to look at life—plain New York life, as he could find it anywhere. Now he paints that kind, and his work has more virility and character to it than years of academic puttering over mush could give it.

Henri pointed out an area on the west wall of the Vanderbilt Gallery where the two paintings in question could be hung, but Charles Yardley Turner, a member of the Hanging Committee, questioned his intent: did he mean to "improve the wall" or simply see to it that the work of certain men was hung? Henri's reply was direct and to the point: "I don't care for the wall, I only care for the men." Despite the response, the Hanging Committee hunted up the Luks and Sprinchorn

canvases and had them hung in the show. Henri's triumph was short lived, however, for the following day they were eliminated once more, the excuse being that "the two paintings in question spoiled the mural effect of the other pictures hung nearby."

The entire episode may have been soon forgotten. "It was nothing," Henri wrote his mother, "but someone unkindly disposed gave a false story to the Post, which the editor did not believe and so I was seen and was asked to give the true account of the matter." Thus the *New York Evening Post* broke the story that "there was a very demonstrative and drastic action at the session of the present jury, when Mr. Henri was compelled to give positive expression to his point of view." His action, Henri stated, was taken to impress upon the other jurors that they were "placing a premium upon the commonplace to the exclusion of work of higher conception, work not necessarily his own, but of all who had come before the jury with something vital to say and had been cast out." When interviewed by the *New York Sun*, Henri spoke in specifics:

You know how George Luks is rejected time and again. Look at this reproduction of one of his pictures I have here. Why, it might have been done by one of the masters, but the academy won't let him even exhibit. A splendid painter like Arthur B. Davies has been so badly treated that for years he has refused even to submit pictures to the jury.

A letter to the editor of the *Sun* was penned by an artist who acknowledged that he had often suffered from the methods Henri now criticized, and a letter printed in the *American Art News* queried: "Is Mr. Henri's attitude a nail in the coffin of the present jury system?"

"The violent denunciations of the Academy's juries . . . can be remedied by the painters themselves," the *Evening Post* suggested. "Let the younger faction start a new organization. The time is ripe." A follow-up article in the *Sun* was the first to reveal that Henri and a few others would probably organize group shows during the 1907-8 season. To Henri the idea was nothing new, for in January 1906 he, Sloan, and Lawson had spoken of an "exhibition next year—each of say some seven of the 'crowd' puts in \$10 per month for a year," but the plan had not borne fruit.

Now Henri asked Davies to approach William Macbeth about the use of his gallery for a show, but when Davies reported back that Macbeth was unable to make a commitment at that time, Henri began investigating other possibilities. He visited the American Art Galleries (an auction house on East Twenty-third Street) and a vacant store nearby which could be rented for \$1,500 a year. On April 15, 1907, another meeting was held, this time attended by Everett Shinn, who arrived toting a bucket of cold water to throw on the entire idea. The impass

## STUDIOS AWAIT '8'S' STAND

EAGER TO KNOW IF THEY WILL SEND SPRING CANVASES.

The Time for Submitting Academy Pictures Is at Hand—Henri Incident Recalled — An Art Gallery Man's Opinion of the Controversy — One Refusal Already Received.

If rumors which at present are flying about uptown studios contain any great element of truth, a nipping and eager atmosphere will characterize the art situation in town this winter, dating from the fall exhibition of the Academy, which begins early in December.

was broken three days later when Macbeth agreed to the show; after all, Davies, Henri, Luks, Lawson, and Prendergast were already among the artists he exhibited. What of Prendergast? Davies wrote him of the plan and by May he replied from Boston that "he is for it strong." Thus Henri's selection of the artists was complete: Sloan, Glackens, Luks, Lawson, Davies, Shinn, Prendergast, and himself.

Interestingly, there were other painters considered. Jerome Myers had been exhibiting at Macbeth's, too, and was Sloan's neighbor and friend. As early as 1903 Henri had commented favorably on Myers' work, and two years later they had exhibited together at Macbeth's. But as Shinn once explained: "We all loved Myers as a person, but his paintings presented a softness, a sweetness, which were no better than an old idea." He seemed to dress his downtrodden in Sunday finery.

And there were two other artists "who

## 8 ARTISTS SECEDE FROM THE ACADEMY

Revolt Led by Robert Henri, as Recently Predicted by The American.

When Robert Henri, the well-known publisher and leader of what is known in art circles as the "Café" Francis school, two months ago withdrew two of his pictures accepted by the National Academy of Design for its annual display, and retitled what he termed the narrow and unfair attitude of the Academy toward young artists, it was predicted in *The American* that there would soon be a noteworthy secession from the old organization.

This prediction has been verified, and it was yesterday announced that eight well-known and strong artists, headed by Robert Henri—the others being William Glackens, Arthur Davies, George Luks, Ernest Lawson, John Sloan, Everett Shinn and Maurice Prendergast—have formed a new organization and will in February, 1908, hold a first annual exhibition at the Macbeth Galleries, No. 450 Fifth Avenue.

This secession follows hard upon the recent amalgamation of the old Academy of Design and the younger Society of American Artists—which it was thought and hoped by the promoters of the union would

might have been of the '8's," as Henri put it, "had one of them been younger or the other older." They were George Bellows, already one of Henri's most successful students, and Albert Pinkham Ryder. Inclusion of Bellows and Ryder would have posed a problem of the group's identity, however, since another organization of artists known as "The Ten" was still very much in existence.

On May 2 "the crowd" met again at Henri's, with all but Prendergast in attendance. Macbeth's terms for the show were revealed: a guarantee from the exhibitors of \$500 (later reduced to \$400) plus 25% of the sales. The proposal was quickly accepted and after Prendergast's approval was in hand, Henri went to the press with the names of the eight exhibitors. He revealed plans for "a noteworthy secession from the old organization" to his pupil Guy Pène du Bois, allowing him to "predict" the group's formation in the *New York American* on May 14, 1907. The next day *Sun* art critic James Gibbons Huneker labeled them "The Eight."

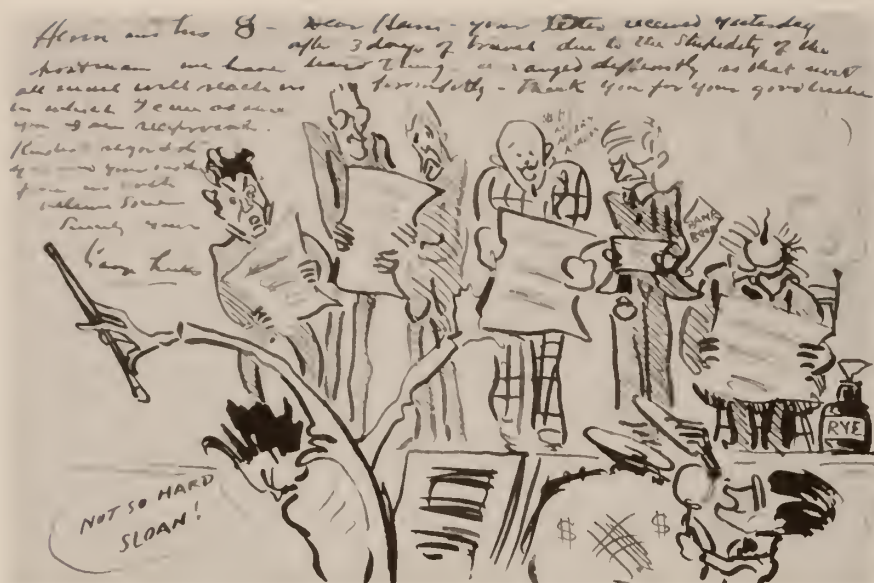
During the ensuing months the coterie made preparations for their show. Each in turn visited the photographic studio of Gertrude Käsebier so that publicity pictures could be taken. Sloan photographed a painting by each of The Eight for the catalogue. Henri determined how the artists' works would be arranged in the two galleries at Macbeth's, while Davies and Sloan assumed the task of designing the catalogue.

During the last hectic days of preparation, Henri was in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, executing a portrait commission. On January 30, 1908, just four days prior to the opening, a



Catalogue cover for the exhibition of The Eight at the Macbeth Galleries, New York, 1908.





George Luks. "Boy and Girl Millionaires Interviewed." Pen-and-ink drawing for the *New York World*, June 21, 1896. Originally a Philadelphia newspaper artist—like Sloan, Glackens, and Shinn—Luks was the first to settle in New York, where his illustrations for the press included these portraits of Harry Payne Whitney and his fiancée, Gertrude Vanderbilt.

worried John Sloan wrote him and asked: "How about sending your pictures to Macbeth? He would like to have them there by Saturday noon if possible."

On the appointed day all of the artists arrived to hang the show, including Prendergast, who was carrying a painting which received the finishing touches just prior to his leaving Boston. Without benefit of a jury or hanging committee, each of The Eight arranged his work within the allotted twenty feet of wall space. Lawson, whose canvases were large, hung only four while Prendergast, with a series of small oil and watercolor studies, arranged seventeen, some double hung. The other artists showed between six and nine works each.

Monday morning, February 3, 1908. William Macbeth began welcoming the first visitors to his domain on the top floor of the building at 450 Fifth Avenue. Both of the sixteen-by-twenty-foot rooms quickly filled. Soon as many as 300 people an hour were estimated to be filing past the sixty-three works of art. "The show . . . is creating a sensation," observed an elated Henri. "It was packed like an

Academy reception from early morning to night." His freely brushed *Laughing Child* faced you upon entering, but many of the visitors failed to smile back.

The second day, the third day, and the crowds continued to arrive in a steady stream, transported to the fourth-floor gallery in a jam-packed little elevator. A snowstorm and a week of slush did not deter the curious, and it was estimated that 7,000 persons viewed the show during its two-week run.

Macbeth admitted to "a loud chorus of disapproval—mostly honest—on the part of many artists and laymen," and the exhibitors each had their own suggestions: Davies criticized the hanging, arguing that the works looked too crowded; Prendergast, the group's failure to produce an expensive-looking catalogue. John Sloan did not visit the gallery until the third day because he was self-conscious about the appearance of his clothes, and an apprehensive Glackens feared "an awful roasting from some of the papers." And he proved to be correct. A hostile review in *Town Topics* was the most vitriolic:

Vulgarity smites one in the face at this exhibition, and I defy you to find anyone in a healthy frame of mind who, for instance, wants to hang Luks' posteriors of pigs . . . or John Sloan's *Hairdresser's Window* in his living rooms or gallery. . . . As for Prendergast, his work is unadulterated artistic slop.

"Bah!" exclaimed another critic. "The whole thing creates a distinct feeling of nausea."

None of The Eight was spared such negative comments: Henri's portraits were likened to "a collection of masks," Glackens was criticized for his "anemic color scheme and the dreariness of his personages," while Lawson's *Winter on the River* was said to display "a wilful lack of design."

On the other hand, Guy Pène du Bois wrote enthusiastically in the *New*

*York American*, and generally complimentary reviews were penned by Huneker of the *Sun* and Frederick James Gregg of the *Evening Sun*. Joseph Edgar Chamberlin of the *New York Evening Mail* characterized Davies' *Many Waters* as "a thing of fantastic beauty, lovely in color and endless in suggestion," and Charles de Kay, of the *Post*, opined that Shinn painted "with extraordinary skill the backs of the heads down in front of the 'Orchestra Pit.'"

Even though the boos appeared to outnumber the bravos, Macbeth was able to report that there had been nearly \$4,000 in sales, a "remarkable success," as he put it, in light of the poor financial climate at the time. Henri's small oil, *Coast of Monhegan*, was sold for \$100 to Mrs. J.E. Cowdin, and another collector acquired Davies' *Autumn Bower* and *A Night Forest—Maenads*. Among the seven works sold in all, four were purchased by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney for the sum of \$2,200: Henri, *Laughing Child* (\$700); Luks, *Woman with Goose* (\$600); Lawson, *Winter on the River* (\$600); and Shinn, *Revue (Blue Girl)* (\$300). Such acquisitions represented a brave act on the part of the sculptor-socialite, for in 1908 the ownership of such unfashionable works was nearly as revolutionary as having painted them.



Everett Shinn. *The Orchestra Pit, Old Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre, 1906-7*. Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 19 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur G. Altschul.

When the exhibition closed on February 19, a request was received from the Rowland Gallery in Boston to have it sent there. While negotiations were underway concerning who would



William J. Glackens. *The Shoppers, 1907*. Oil on canvas, 60 × 60 inches. The Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia; Gift of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.



John Sloan. *Hairdresser's Window, Sixth Avenue, 1907*. Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 26 inches. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection.

underwrite the cost of shipping, the Pennsylvania Academy offered to take the show and "place at your disposal two good rooms during the month of March." The artists agreed, substitutions were made for the works sold, and the Philadelphia version opened on March 7, 1908. While the art was being prepared for shipment, Mrs. Whitney additionally purchased four red chalk drawings and a monotype by Everett Shinn.

In Philadelphia the press was more favorably inclined, perhaps due to the fact that four of The Eight were still remembered as newspapermen who had worked there. A week prior to the opening Henri sent an explanatory letter to the Pennsylvania Academy:

The name "The Eight" is not of our making nor do we desire that or any other name. We are not a society and are not organized for any other purpose nor for a longer time than the duration of this exhibition. . . . There has therefore never been an organization or a society called "The Eight."

There were expectations among the artists that the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio would book the show for April, but a telegram altered that prospect: "Sorry but are full. Could take exhibit in fall gladly." When a similar response was received from the Detroit Museum of Art, Sloan began mapping plans for an Eight traveling show. By July 1908 he was able to write Henri: "The latest information . . . Chicago, a month—Toledo, a month, Detroit, a month, and Indianapolis . . . Grand Rapids and Milwaukee . . . Cincinnati and Buffalo."

When the exhibition opened at the Art Institute of Chicago on September 8, it was referred to as "Paintings by Eight American Artists Resident in New York and Boston," a title which remained throughout the tour. At the next stop, Toledo, a newspaper headline proclaimed: "Big Sensation at the Art Museum." As reported in the *Toledo Times*, one woman was overheard to say, "Really, I am beginning to feel there is something wrong with



John Sloan. *The Cot, 1907*. Oil on canvas, 36 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 30 inches. Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine.





George Luks. *Woman with Goose*, 1907. Oil on wood panel, 20 × 16 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 31.288.



Robert Henri. *Laughing Child*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 24 × 20 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 31.240.



Ernest Lawson. *Winter on the River*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 33 × 40 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 31.280.



Everett Shinn. *Revue (Blue Girl)*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 18 × 24 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 31.146.

my eyes," while another gallerygoer confessed, "I feel real creepy, but it's fine, and I like it, after I've been here awhile."

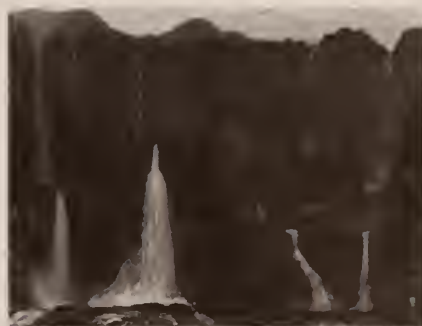
The traveling exhibition continued on its ten-month circuit with a schedule somewhat different from the one envisioned by Sloan: Chicago, Toledo, Detroit, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Bridgeport, and Newark. In May 1909, Henri and Sloan helped hang the show at the Newark Public Library, after which the paintings were returned to the artists without benefit of a single sale. There was talk of holding a second exhibition of The Eight in New York in February 1909, but this never materialized. The preceding October, Luks had inquired of Sloan: "Are the 'Eight' going to have a show this season? I think we should—as there naturally will [be] anxiety on the part of our admirers, what we'll spring on 'em."

Sloan, having just completed the task of preparing the traveling exhibition, was inclined to ignore the suggestion, but when Henri broached the subject six weeks later, he found that Sloan favored it. A meeting of the group was scheduled but never held, for upon inquiring of Macbeth, Henri learned that the gallery was already booked for the season. "Macbeth said he would be sorry to see the '8' anyplace else," Henri reported. "There will probably be no '8' show therefore this winter in New York."

Although a second Eight exhibition never took place, the show and the group generated widespread reforms. Henri and his associates had opened the door to artistic freedom, to subject matter which dealt with everyday life, and to the concept of organizing invitational, group shows without benefit of a jury. In the process they were quick to be labeled the leaders of a truly indigenous school of American art.

Repercussions from The Eight exhibition were most noticeable within the National Academy of Design itself. In the Academy's spring 1908 annual, which followed on the heels of the Macbeth show, a larger percentage of works by young and unknown artists was included. But the progressivism was short lived. In the 1910 annual, only Henri, Glackens, and Lawson from among The Eight had works accepted. The group's response was quick in coming. On March 10, 1910, "a great crowd" attended a meeting at Henri's to discuss a large, alternative exhibition. A building at 29-31 West Thirty-fifth Street was rented for the month of April, with the initial funds being supplied by Henri, Sloan, Walt Kuhn, and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, among others.

The resultant 1910 "Exhibition of Independent Artists" displayed some 631 drawings, paintings, and sculpture by 103 artists. It was the largest "no jury, no prizes" exhibition to date. In a show of democratic spirit, the works were hung in alphabetical order, according to artists' names. All of The Eight but Luks were represented.



Arthur B. Davies. *Many Waters*, c. 1907-8. Oil on canvas, 17 × 22 inches. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

The following year Henri inaugurated an artist-organized exhibition plan at the MacDowell Club, where twenty groups of eight to twelve artists showed each season. And when the seeds for the Armory Show were being planted in December 1911, one of its organizers, Walt Kuhn, revealed how it was motivated, in part, by sentiments which challenged the leadership of Henri and The Eight:

Of course Henri and the rest will have to be let in—but not until things are chained up so that they can't do any monkey business. He's so wrapped up in the MacDowell Club that he is off guard, and I'll put it over before he knows it.

The Association of American Painters and Sculptors, sponsors of the Armory Show, included seven of The Eight—only Shinn was missing. Davies, as its president and acknowledged organizer, was largely responsible for the avant-garde nature of the exhibition. Once again Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney was involved, this time contributing \$1,000 toward the purchase of garlands of greenery and festooned ceiling decorations.

Mrs. Whitney's association with The Eight endured. In 1914 she converted the building adjoining her studio in Greenwich Village into an art gallery which she named the Whitney Studio. Henri exhibited there in the inaugural year at one of a series of benefit shows which were held to help various charities. Davies was included, too, in a sale to aid French artists at the outbreak of World War I. Glackens and Luks showed there in 1916, Shinn and Prendergast in 1917, and Lawson the following year.

On January 7, 1916, John Sloan wrote to the benefactor:



Maurice B. Prendergast. *St. Malo No. 1*, c. 1907. Watercolor on paper, 13½ × 19½ inches. Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; Gift of Ferdinand Howald.

May I take this opportunity of asking you to consider giving me a "one man show" in your galleries? The dealers in the city are not inclined to show more than one or two of my pictures at any one time—most of them not at all—and I feel that a collection shown together would be, at least, an artistic success, and might attract considerable public notice.

When Mrs. Whitney obliged, it marked Sloan's first one-man show anywhere.

In 1915 she had founded the Friends of the Young Artists and shortly thereafter sent the following letter:

Dear Mr. Henri,

I have lately become interested in the Society for the Americanization of Immigrants in America, and have decided to hold a competition and offer prizes for the best expression, through an artistic medium, of the meaning of America to the Immigrant. The exhibition will be held in November, and I should be so glad if you would consent to act as a judge on that occasion.

Henri served on the jury and helped award \$1,100 in prizes. The Friends had been formed "to give young artists in this country the opportunity to show their work" in competitive exhibitions which provided cash awards. Henri apparently spoke with Mrs. Whitney concerning his concept of "no jury, no prizes" because she subsequently announced a change in policy, doing away with both jury and awards for future exhibitions. In their stead, the money saved was earmarked for purchases.

When the Society of Independent Artists was organized in 1917, with Glackens as its first president (Sloan was its second), Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney became a director and during the next fifteen years paid the deficit which accrued from each annual show. Another institution, the Whitney Studio Club, was launched in 1918, with Sloan, Glackens, and Lawson among its charter members. And a dozen years later the original Whitney Studio on West Eighth Street became the first home of the Whitney Museum, the country's foremost art museum devoted exclusively to American art.

The research material for this essay has been gathered from the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut; the Free Library of Philadelphia; the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; the archives of the Macbeth Galleries, New York; the archives of the National Academy of Design, New York; the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations; the Sloan Collection, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; the archives of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and from the diaries and correspondence of Robert Henri and John Sloan. Additional information came from conversations and correspondence during the last three decades with Guy Pène du Bois, Ira Glackens, Rockwell Kent, Stewart Klonis and Rosina A. Florio (former and present executive directors of the Art Students League of New York), Robert G. McIntyre and Hazel J. Lewis of the Macbeth Galleries, Violet Organ and Janet Le Clair (former and present heirs to the estate of Robert Henri), Mary Fanton Roberts, Margery Ryerson, Everett Shinn, Mrs. John Sloan, and Carl Sprinchorn.



# The Eight January 13–March 20, 1983 Checklist of the Exhibition

## Arthur B. Davies (1862–1928)

*A Double Realm*, c. 1906  
Oil on canvas, 15 × 29 inches  
The Brooklyn Museum; Gift of Robert Macbeth in memory of William Macbeth  
*Many Waters*, c. 1907–8  
Oil on canvas, 17 × 22 inches  
The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.  
*Across the Bay (Across the Harbor)*, 1908  
Oil on canvas, 17½ × 23 inches  
Indianapolis Museum of Art; James E. Roberts Fund

## William J. Glackens (1870–1938)

*Maypole, Central Park*, 1905  
Oil on canvas, 25½ × 30½ inches  
The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Gift of the Charles E. Merrill Trust with matching funds from the de Young Museum Society  
*Buen Retiro, Madrid*, 1906  
Oil on canvas, 25½ × 32 inches  
Collection of Ira and Nancy Glackens  
*The Shoppers*, 1907  
Oil on canvas, 60 × 60 inches  
The Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia; Gift of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.

## Robert Henri (1865–1929)

*Dutch Soldier*, 1907  
Oil on canvas, 32½ × 26½ inches  
Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York  
*Laughing Child*, 1907  
Oil on canvas, 24 × 20 inches  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.240  
*Little Girl in White Apron*, n.d.  
Oil on canvas, 24 × 20 inches  
Estate of Loretta Hines Howard

## Portrait of a Dutch Fisherman, n.d.

Oil on canvas, 24 × 20 inches  
The Westmoreland County Museum of Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Hirsch

## Ernest Lawson (1873–1939)

*Winter on the River*, 1907  
Oil on canvas, 33 × 40 inches  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.280  
*An Abandoned Farm*, c. 1908  
Oil on canvas, 28½ × 35½ inches  
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Gift of William T. Evans

## River Scene with Boys and Boat (Swimming Hole), n.d.

Oil on canvas, 25½ × 30½ inches  
The Brooklyn Museum; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Russell Hopkinson

## George Luks (1867–1933)

*The Duchess*, 1905  
Oil on canvas, 30 × 25 inches  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; George A. Hearn Fund

## Hester Street, 1905

Oil on canvas, 26½ × 36½ inches  
The Brooklyn Museum; Dick S. Ramsay Fund

## Woman with Goose, 1907

Oil on wood panel, 20 × 16 inches  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.288

## Woman with Macaws, 1907

Oil on canvas, 41 × 33 inches  
The Detroit Institute of Arts; Gift of Miss Julia E. Peck

## Maurice B. Prendergast (1859–1924)

*In Central Park*, c. 1901  
Watercolor on paper, 12½ × 20 inches  
Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts

## St. Malo No. 1, c. 1907

Watercolor on paper, 13½ × 19½ inches  
Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; Gift of Ferdinand Howald

## Crescent Beach, St. Malo, n.d.

Oil on wood panel, 10½ × 13½ inches  
Center Gallery of Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania; Gift of Mrs. Ellen Clarke Bertrand

## Young Girls at Play, n.d.

Oil on canvas, 30 × 30 inches  
Private collection

## Everett Shinn (1876–1953)

*The White Ballet*, 1904  
Oil on canvas, 28½ × 35½ inches  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur G. Altschul

## Theatre Box (Gaieté, Montparnasse), 1906

Oil on canvas, 16½ × 20½ inches  
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Gift of T. Edward Hanley

## The Orchestra Pit, Old Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre, 1906–7

Oil on canvas, 17½ × 19½ inches  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur G. Altschul

## Revue (Blue Girl), 1908

Oil on canvas, 18 × 24 inches  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.146

## John Sloan (1871–1951)

*The Cot*, 1907  
Oil on canvas, 36½ × 30 inches  
Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine

## Election Night, Herald Square, 1907

Oil on canvas, 25½ × 31½ inches  
Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester; R.T. Miller Jr. Fund

## Hairdresser's Window, Sixth Avenue, 1907

Oil on canvas, 31½ × 26 inches  
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection

## Sixth Avenue and Thirtieth Street, 1907

Oil on canvas, 25½ × 35½ inches  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Meyer P. Potamkin

Concurrently with the Whitney Museum exhibition, the Art Students League of New York is presenting "The Immortal Eight and Its Influence" from January 9 through 29. Highlighting one work by each of The Eight and including approximately 150 paintings, sculptures, and prints by League artists who were influenced by them, the exhibition spans seventy-five years, from the late 1900s to the present. Among the artists represented are Peggy Bacon, George Bellows, Alexander Calder, Stuart Davis, Guy Pène du Bois, John Graham, Edward Hopper, Reginald Marsh, Barnett Newman, Man Ray, and David Smith.

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## Whitney Museum of American Art

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'THE EIGHT' EXHIBIT  
NEW ART REALISM  
Crowds at the Macbeth Gallery  
Show Great Interest in the  
"Outlaw" Salon.